

## Cosatu warns of renewed farm violence

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Cape Town - Failure to meet a deadline for a review of the sectoral determination for agriculture could result in a repeat of violent strikes, Cosatu said on Tuesday.

Western Cape Congress of SA Trade Unions secretary Tony Ehrenreich said Labour Minister Mildred Oliphant was adding fuel to the fire by saying it would be impossible to meet the 4 December deadline.

He said he understood wage reviews took time, but her remarks undermined negotiations between AgriSA and unions.

"The minister should be supporting this process, but in her statement she sounds more like the minister of farmers instead of the minister of labour."

Ehrenreich said Oliphant should not "wash her hands" of the situation, but should provide leadership and a sense of urgency to the review.

Oliphant announced on Tuesday that the sectoral determination could only be reviewed in April.

"I hope it is quite clear that the deadline of December 4 2012 is practically impossible to achieve, considering the limitations as per the Basic Conditions of Employment Act," she told reporters in Pretoria.

She said the act allowed a review of the determination only 12 months after promulgation. The latest sectoral determination was put in place in March and would have been in place until February 2015.

Sixteen Western Cape towns were hit by violent protests this month over farming wages and working conditions. Two people died and there was extensive damage to property.

The protests started with table grape harvesters in De Doorns, who were calling for wages of R150 a day. Most earned between R69 and R75 a day.

Workers agreed to suspend their strike until 4 December on condition that the employment condition commission (ECC) look at the sectoral determination for agriculture. The ECC advises Oliphant on wages and other conditions of employment. As part of the strike suspension agreement, Oliphant published her intention to cancel the current sectoral determination, which sets minimum monthly wages at R1 503.90.

Public hearings for workers and their employers began last week in the Western Cape and were set to end in the Eastern Cape and Gauteng on 13 December.

Representatives of both sides had been in negotiations since the strike was suspended. Oliphant called for workers to refrain from violence.

When asked if workers would hold off on further protests until April she said: "I can't guarantee that one. I can't say there will be a strike or what'll be going on."

Ehrenreich said should AgriSA and the unions come to an agreement, there would definitely be no strike on 4 December. Should a strike go ahead, it would most likely lead to violence and death.

"This strike... can set back labour relations on farms by decades and could see a reversal to the low-level civil war we all witnessed on farms a few weeks ago," he said.

## **Union: Oliphant insensitive**

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Cape Town - It is insensitive of Labour Minister Mildred Oliphant to use legal technicalities to override farmworkers' concerns, their union said on Wednesday.

"She should have asked why stakeholders are engaging despite such a law or its interpretation, instead of unilaterally making a pronouncement," Food and Allied Workers' Union general secretary Katishi Masemola said.

He said her "unilateral stance" would only harden farmers' attitudes and strengthen the resolve by farmworkers to strike again on December 4.

Oliphant announced on Tuesday that the sectoral determination for farmworkers could only be reviewed in April next year, and not by the given deadline of December 4.

She said the Basic Conditions of Employment Act only allowed a review 12 months after promulgation.

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Masemola called on Oliphant to exercise leadership in the negotiations.

"The central cause of the current situation emanates from legislation residing right on top of her desk, and needs to be approached differently and not with technicalities," he said.

The union said it could not guarantee the workers' reaction to Oliphant's announcement.

It called for calm and peace during labour demonstrations.

Western Cape premier Helen Zille said on Wednesday that the army should be deployed to rural areas on the day of the deadline to keep the peace.

In a letter to Defence Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, she said that some organisations were distributing pamphlets calling for a "day of action and mobilisation" on December 4.

"We must do everything we can to prevent the further outbreak of violence on farms in the province," she said.

Cosatu general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi called for a new wage settlement. He said nothing was stopping farmers from agreeing to a wage increase while the ECC considered a review of minimum wages.

Farm employers were not co-operating and some were using private security companies, he said.

"There is a danger of the situation getting out of everyone's control," Vavi said.